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1972/03/23

~~TOP SECRET~~ UNCLASSIFIED

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON D.C. 20301

23 MAR 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

SUBJECT: Progress of Vietnamization

Subsequent to receipt of NSSM 151, Vietnamese Air Force Capabilities, dated 15 March 1972, your staff has provided additional outline drafts for information on US Forces in Vietnam, RVNAF Improvement and Cambodia.

I appreciate receiving the advance outline drafts. I believe such cooperation will allow us to make much more productive use of our staffs. I believe the proposed studies constitute a review of some of the central features of Vietnamization. The other proposed study involves an ancillary issue -- Cambodia.

I believe that I can respond more effectively to the questions which have been raised on Vietnam by replying unilaterally rather than through interdepartmental mechanisms. This is all the more true because there are critical matters on which I shall want to report which lie outside the parameters of your Staff's outline. These matters include, inter alia, the basing posture in Southeast Asia, sortie rates, the net balance between RVNAF and DRV forces, RVNAF interdiction capabilities, the economic aspects in the RVN of projected RVNAF postures, the possibility of a volunteer reserve force, and the relationship of our force deployments to negotiations for the return of our prisoners. I believe at this juncture a timely report to the President can be accomplished better from the Department than by an interdepartmental effort.

The Cambodian situation is different. I agree with you that an interdepartmental study is desirable at this time. I concur in the study outline proposed.

Finally, a final note on redeployments. I believe we should continue to avoid terms such as "transitional remaining force" or "interim remaining force" to designate our declining US forces in Vietnam. Use of the term "remaining force" has adverse and uncomplimentary connotations. I suggest we drop this term, "residual force", from our lexicon.

Declassified on 9/23/96
pursuant to E.O. 12958
National Security Council

TRANSCRIPTION FOLLOWS

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I appreciate receiving the advance outline drafts. I believe such cooperation will allow us to make much more productive use of our staffs. Three of the proposed studies constitute a review of some of the central features of Vietnamization. The other proposed study involves an ancillary issue – Cambodia.

I believe that I can respond more effectively to the questions which have been raised on Vietnam by replying unilaterally rather than through interdepartmental mechanisms. This is all the more true because there are political matters on which I shall want to report which lie outside the parameters of your Staff's outline. These matters include, inter alia, [illegible] basing posture in Southeast Asia, sortie rates, the net balance [illegible] RVNAF and DRV forces, RVNAF interdiction capabilities, the economic [illegible] the RVN of projected RVNAF postures, the possibility of a volunteer [illegible] force, and the relationship of our force deployments to negotiations for the return of our prisoners. I believe at this junction a timely report to the President can be accomplished better from the Department than [illegible] interdepartmental effort.

The Cambodian situation is different. I agree with you that an interdepartmental study is desirable at this time. I concur in the study outline proposed.

[Illegible] allow me a final note on redeployments. I believe we should continue to use terms such as "transitional remaining force" or "interim remaining force" to designate our declining U.S. forces in Vietnam. Use of the term "[illegible] force" has adverse and uncomplimentary connotations. I suggest [illegible] the term, "residual force", from our lexicon.

Melvin R. Laird